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The Government of Municipalities. By DORMAN B. EATON. New York: The Columbia University Press, 1899, 8vo. pp. x + 498 + 14 + 14.

WHILE Mr. Eaton's book will prove of deep interest to the political scientist and municipal reformer, the student of economics will doubtless find it somewhat disappointing. Aside from a four-page summary of some of the good work done by British cities, there is no discussion of public utilities. Franchises and municipal finance—subjects of such vital importance just now in America—are almost wholly ignored.

The work is mainly an elaboration of the thesis that the government of American cities is bad because it is party government. Tammany democracy is minutely described by way of illustration, while an account of the Greater New York charter is dragged in at the end of the book, apparently as an afterthought, to prove how serious a menace to the state party government in a great city may be. City government on the continent is somewhat superficially examined, and a careful study is made of the British system to show the practical workings of non-partisan city government.

Mr. Eaton's scheme of reform, which closely follows the British model, has as its main feature a powerful non-partisan council, a mayor with very limited powers elected by the council from its own body, non-partisan boards in charge of various branches of the administration, and civil service, or as he prefers to designate it the merit system, and labor registration, as the methods for selecting city employees. It is rather surprising that Mr. Eaton, who has devoted more than thirty years to the cause of civil service reform, and who has drafted such a practical and successful piece of legislation as the federal civil service act of 1883, avoids riding the merit system as a hobby. He lays much more stress on methods for securing a non-partisan council. He proposes a unicameral, continuous body, made up of four classes: (1) alderman elected from the city at large; (2) aldermen elected from a few large districts; (3) aldermen appointed by the council from public spirited citizens—men and women who have already served the city unofficially along some philanthropic or esthetic line, and (4) honorary aldermen, who serve without compensation or vote, also chosen by the council from ex-officers of the city. Free nomination and free voting in the choice of all these classes are expected to work wonders

in securing an able, really representative, and non-partisan body. It will surprise some Illinois reformers to find the election of members of the lower house of the Illinois legislature held up as the shining example of the system of free (or cumulative) voting. Professor Commons, in his work on proportional representation—a book frequently cited by Mr. Eaton—presents, as the result of a careful examination of the history of the last thirty years, by no means so rose-colored a view. While fully recognizing the advantages of a minority representation secured by the system, he finds that third party and non-partisan candidates are seldom elected; that in order to avoid waste and guess-work, party organization is strengthened; that there are frequent deals between party bosses; that where, as often happens, nomination is equivalent to election, the worst elements gain control, and that, in general, the quality and ability of the representatives is no better than under the old system. This testimony tends to confirm the impression that a mechanical device of this sort, unsupported by a high public sentiment, will fail as a panacea.

The autocratic mayor, by so many recent writers regarded as the chief hope of municipal reform, is to Mr. Eaton undemocratic, and the embodiment of all that is worst in partisan government. He regards the few much-cited cases of benevolent despotism as accidents, unfortunately made the most of by designing politicians and gullible would-be reformers.

Great confidence in the plans he proposes is undoubtedly to be expected from one whose past efforts at reform have been so generally successful. It is natural, too, that the book should show very clearly that the author writes from the standpoint of New York City. One wishes that a certain verbosity and tendency to frequent repetition were lacking; and that the work, which was written during a series of years, had been revised and brought up to date in all parts, so that the reader would not be compelled to translate “now”—1895, 1897, or 1899 in turn.

In these days of frequent experiment in municipal government, it would not be remarkable if a plan, clearly outlined by such an eminent authority as Mr. Eaton, were given a trial. Such a trial would be watched with great interest, and its success, even if far less complete than the author anticipates, would be the cause of sincere rejoicing.

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